

I want to nominate Melissa Claar, MPH, CEAS III, AOEAS, Safety Specialist, and Certified Ergonomics Assessment Specialist III and the UK Occupational Health and Safety Office for her conception and initiation of the program Ergo Corner.

Ergo Corner, designed to reduce ergonomic risks and prevent potential injuries (such as cumulative trauma disorders and repetitive motion injuries) was introduced to campus in 2016 as a resource to prevent/reduce the number of work-related injuries while recognizing the balance of employee safety and the budgetary challenges faced by our campus community. Ergo Corner is a free program for all employees at UK and provides free ergonomic chairs, keyboards, footstools, document holders, keyboard trays, and other office equipment. Appropriate equipment along with proper work practices will help reduce ergonomic risks and prevent potential injuries such as cumulative trauma disorders and repetitive motion injuries. A good ergonomic chair helps reduce the strain on your back and can begin to make you feel better in general.

The University of Kentucky has long advocated a healthy lifestyle for our campus community. Kentucky employees spend long working hours sitting in chairs training and working. Research has linked sitting for long periods of time with many health concerns, including obesity and metabolic syndrome — a cluster of conditions that includes increased blood pressure, high blood sugar, excess body fat around the waist and abnormal cholesterol levels. Walking meetings, standing desks, stretching and moving each hour, and exercise and nutritional advice are just some of the ways that the University of Kentucky promotes the power of movement and advocates healthy living.

Melissa realized that ergonomic injuries did not capture the same attention as the importance of movement and healthy nutrition had on the overall health and well-being of our employees. Melissa and Lee Poore, the Director of UK OHS, initiated this program to resolve identified ergonomic injuries experienced by our employees and to make it cost-effective for all UK departments. OHS compiles data from all injuries that occur on campus and UK affiliated facilities throughout the state. This data helped Melissa to identify common ergonomic injuries experienced by UK employees and the common contributing factors surrounding them. Melissa knew that UK Surplus (department where most UK discarded items are stored in a “corner” after being replaced or no longer in use) had a significant amount of ergonomic furniture and equipment that could be refurbished and still be used to assist our employees.

Melissa initiated the Ergo Corner program as part of the UK commitment to the health of our employees as a way to decrease the incidents of repetitive motion injuries, reduce the number of injury and pain to our employees, which manifests itself into better productivity, less employee absences due to injury or sick days, and relieving the everyday stresses of the office. Melissa will visit an employee’s office at their or department request to conduct an ergonomic assessment and then plug in her findings to identify which equipment would best suit the employee to reduce or prevent ergonomic injury and stress on the body. This equipment is provided at no cost to the department or employee. Melissa uses the equipment still under warranty to re-furbish to working status and then (thanks to an agreement that she and UK OHS Director initiated with UK Administration as part of the safety and health campaign) is able to provide to the employee or department.

The Ergo Corner Program started in 2016 and thanks to Melissa's unique marketing campaign (safety events on campaign, word of mouth at department meetings, social media) is having a significant impact. In 2016, 67 employee assessments were conducted and equipment provided to our employees. In 2017, 136 employees utilized this program to better their health and working area. 2018 has already seen 73 ergonomic assessments by the end of March. Statistical data has shown a 15% decrease in the number of reported ergonomic injuries from 2016 – March 2018. Furthermore, Melissa and UK OHS have provided over 176 ergonomic pieces of equipment with a value of \$70, 473.00 at a total cost to each employee/department of \$0.00. This is largely in part to the work that Melissa, Lee, and UK OHS has conducted with the UK administration, securing equipment warranties that are still in place for discarded equipment that was no longer in use and already owned by the university and initiating contracts at a reduced rate to ergonomic vendors.

Ergo Corner is a valuable program to the overall health and safety of our campus community. Its brief existence is already proven to be a success story by helping to reduce the potential injuries of repetitive motion injuries by 15% and providing needed equipment to those that need it. The success of this program and the work that has been placed into helping employees stay safe and injury free as well as the unique cost effective measures attached to it are a measure to the dedication to safety exemplified by Melissa Claar and UK OHS.

I sincerely hope that you give this nomination, Melissa Claar, and UK OHS department the attention that it deserves.